Homelessness in the Land of Opportunity?

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"The landscape of urban America, and of an urbanizing world, brings rich and poor together — and keeps them worlds apart"
— Mary Schmitz

In South Carolina's Charleston, a stroll along Meeting Street provides evidence of this world divide. Expensive boutiques, hotels, and restaurants line Meeting Street at this city's center, inevitably attracting flocks of meandering tourists. As you wander further north along Meeting Street, however, indicators of economic disparity increase and a very different world emerges. Pawn shops, fast food chains, and dilapidated houses replace the designer boutiques, fancy restaurants, and restored mansions. A homeless shelter serves as a satirical substitute for the five-star hotels viewed at the city's center. Drug addicts rather than tourists loiter here. In cities across the United States, throughways like Meeting Street precariously connect vastly different worlds.

How do these two worlds exist in the supposed land of opportunity? College surveys, and even interviews with elementary school children, illustrate the common belief that the world of poverty is chosen through alcoholism, drugs, or pure laziness (Cozzarelli 2001; Karniol 1985). Former President Ronald Reagan even stated that "one problem that we've had, even in the best of times, is the people sleeping on the grates, the homeless who are homeless […] by choice" (*Good Morning America* 1984). This underlying assumption of individual choice harks back to

the American pick-oneself-up-by-the-bootstraps mentality. Accordingly, those who live on the "wrong" side of Meeting Street have chosen not to seize upon opportunities for achieving the American Dream. Although numerous studies demonstrate a connection between homelessness and substance abuse, mental illness, and other "personal attributes" (Ellickson 1990; Latkin et al. 1998; Schutt and Meschede 1994), other studies (and logic itself) suggest that the hardships of poverty and homelessness may lead to destructive coping mechanisms (Johnson and Freels 1997; Weinberg and Koegel 1995). Americans tend to presume that homelessness is reached through poor decisions entirely within the individual's control, ignoring the structural elements that may shape "antisocial" behaviors.

A discrepancy between wage and rent levels is just one of many greater social structures that plays an undeniable role in poverty and, ultimately, homelessness (Bogard et al. 1999; Lee et al. 2003; Wong and Piliavin 1997, Wright 2000). For instance, in Charleston you can work full-time and still remain under the poverty line because the hourly wage necessary for renting a two-bedroom apartment downtown is approximately twice the minimum wage (McDermott 9B). In fact, out of 3,066 counties within the United States, only 4 have rent and utility rates for a single-bedroom apartment that are affordable with federal minimum wage (McDermott 9B). Not surprisingly, 40-45% of Americans are less than 3 months of paychecks away from homelessness (Gilbert 2003). Ultimately, the interaction of various personal and institutional factors leads to homelessness (Main 1998).

We return to the shelter on Meeting Street where homeless families are attempting to pull-themselves-up-by-the-bootstraps. According to the American Dream (as promoted by Horatio Alger), even children originating from homeless families can achieve socio-economically through a little "luck and pluck." This study explores these children's access to social, cultural and social capital for socioeconomic mobility. Homeless children have little opportunity to move to the other world on Meeting Street. I hope to shed some light on the road blocks and construct alternative routes.

Theoretical Framework: Human, Cultural, and Social Capital

Human, cultural and social capital represent different types of resources (Bullen and Kenway 2004; Carter 2003; Lin 200; Ennet et al. 1999; Bourdieu 1986). Each type of capital is interconnected; therefore, the forms developed in one both determine and reinforce forms developed in the others (Chin and Phillips 2004; Crowell 2004; Furtenberg and Hughes 1995; Coleman 1998). Ultimately, the combined resources provided by these three types of capital constitute a structure of opportunities for socio-economic mobility (Carter 2003; Astone et al. 1999; Woodhall 1987; Featherman and Hauser 1978).

Human capital consists of an individual's skills and knowledge, which increasing his or her productivity (Becker 1993). Theoretically, educational institutions develop human capital by preparing individuals for meeting the demands of the workforce (Woodhall 1987). According to Becker, "schooling raises earnings by providing knowledge skills and a way of analyzing problems" which help with both searching and applying for jobs (19).   Since professional positions generally require specific educational credentials, "low educational attainment may limit individuals to jobs with wages below the poverty line" (Solarz and Bogat 1990). In fact, those without high school degrees have experienced around a 30% loss in wages since the 1970s (Becker 18).

Indeed, multiple studies demonstrate a positive correlation between educational attainment and socioeconomic achievement (U.S. Census Bureau 2004; Taneja 2000; Featherman and Hauser 1978). For instance, Blau and Duncan (1964) found in their comparative analysis of sons' and fathers' socio-economic achievement that "the chances of upward mobility are directly related to education" (156). Another study found performance in secondary school predictive of later career success, particularly for children from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Schoon et al. 2004). In addition, Schoon et al. 2004 discovered a positive correlation between education and psychological stability. Personal health is an important form of human capital because it affects productivity (Becker 1993). Thus, homeless children's opportunities for socio-economic achievement may depend on the development of human capital through academic attainment.

Cultural capital consists of the ability to behave in a socially acceptable manner according to the situation (Hannerz 1996; Wilson 1996). Behavioral and psychosocial skills are learned throughout childhood with exposure to social norms and expectations. According to Bourdieu, people eventually develop "*habitus* — patterns of thought, comprehension, and behavior" shaped by their social environment (Katz-Gerro 208). Different dispositions develop corresponding to the social environment in which they are formed and, therefore, may not transfer over as cultural capital in other environments. As Carter (2003) explains, cultural capital is "context-specific," with appropriate behavior defined by the social environment. Accordingly, the contexts of different socioeconomic classes shape various forms of *habitus*.

A debate remains as to whether socioeconomic achievement is more attributable to the cultural capital or human capital developed in educational institutions (Bourdieu 1986; Woodhall 1987; Becker 1993). Since certain classes control the educational system (Brown et al. 2003), adopting their form of *habitus* may be necessary for academic attainment. Credentials of educational attainment represent a form of cultural capital controlled by the white middle class (Brown et al. 2005). Academic credentials act as a "screening device" for employers by, supposedly, ensuring a certain level of "motivation" and reference for authority and regulations from applicants (Woodhall 222). The children at the shelter must adopt these features of middle class *habitus* to develop cultural capital necessary for academic attainment and, ultimately, socio-economic achievement.

Social capital consists of resources accessible to individuals through their relationships with others who have these resources. According to Bourdieu, social capital is maintained by "obligations" between individuals through the "exchange" of various resources (e.g., a cup of sugar) and "recognition" of this transaction (e.g., a piece of cake) (52). For instance, Martin et al. (2004) found that social capital in an extended family and greater community reduces risks of violence and hunger for underprivileged households due to the existence of support and trust. Consequently, social capital can "impact how physical, mental, social, economic, and spiritual needs are met" (Warren 1981 qtd. in Crowell 15). Furthermore, according to Lin (2000), "embeddedness in resource-

rich social networks increases useful information, in routine exchanges and without actively seeking such information" (792). For instance, social capital can both provide information about the opening of job positions as well as increase opportunity for actually acquiring them (Lin 1999).

Perhaps people who are living at a shelter have slipped to the very bottom of our socio-economic hierarchy partially because they lacked a strong social network as a safety net (McChesney 1995). According to Lin (1999), "social capital is contingent on initial positions in social hierarchies as well as on the extensity of social ties. Thus, the socio-economic position in which homeless children find themselves affects their development of social capital (467). Children create their own social networks within their school and neighborhood environments (Chin and Phillips 2004).   Because social networks develop through these ties, "divisons between poor and nonpooor" solidify, reducing future job opportunities for poor children (Livermore and Neutrom 95). Thus, homeless children may encounter more barriers to socioeconomic achievement and mobility due to their exclusion from social networks that might produce employment opportunities. Social capital plays an important role in developing human capital through educational attainment. For instance, children's social networks can provide them with "valued resources" (Crosnoe et al. 2004) that ultimately increase academic achievement among high schoolers. Similarly, a study by Coleman (1988) suggests that stronger social networks with family and community members reduce the risk of sophomores dropping out of high school. In yet another study, relationships with teachers who provide encouragement and with fellow students who are academically oriented proved beneficial for academic success (Schoon et al. 2004; Crosno et al. 2003). Chin and Phillips (2004) also found that social capital helps children "learn about and gain access to programs and activities" that provide academic enrichment (both cultural and human capital) and the possibility to increase social networks (social capital) (187).

The interconnection of human, cultural, and social capital results in the impairment or enhancement of each type of capital based on the development of the other types. Receiving school credentials is one

way of building human capital for socio-economic mobility; however, several studies have suggested that social capital may provide more beneficial resources than human capital (Lin 1999). At the same time, cultural capital helps in developing greater social capital and human capital is important in developing cultural capital. Going full circle, the connection between human and cultural capital is illustrated in a study by Katz-Gerro's (2002) in which education was found to be the greatest factor determining cultural consumption, a manifestation of cultural capital. Together, the resources from all three types of capital can provide opportunity for socioeconomic achievement and mobility.

Access to Human, Cultural, and Social Capital

In order for the land of opportunity to truly live up to its name, even children living at a shelter must have access to the forms of capital that allow for socio-economic mobility. According to Bourdieu (1986), "power and privilege — always emanating from context specific historical, social and cultural forces" ensures the continuity of capital from one generation to the next (49). Those who have access to critical resources generally do not part with them easily. Cultural capital can actually be viewed as one of the protective boundaries drawn between the less privileged populace and more powerful elites. In fact, Bourdieu blames "*habitus* — patterns of thought, comprehension, and behavior" for the "cultural choices that reproduce the very class structure itself" (Katz-Gerro 2002).

The institution of education is often criticized for embracing forms of cultural capital possessed by the more privileged and disdaining other forms. Because school credentials act as a form of human capital, the access that students have to preferred forms of cultural capital also affects their access to human capital. Schoon et al. (2004) argue that "teachers develop preferences for certain students who are perceived as college bound" and these are "generally children from privileged families" (386). This effect is even more detrimental to those lacking the "preferred" form of cultural capital when it also separates poor children from peers who could act as important forms of social capital, both financially and academically. Thus, the educational system that is supposed to ensure equal opportunity among Americans may actually

serve as a falsely legitimizing the unequal access to different forms of social, cultural, and human capital.

Families are perhaps the main source for the perpetuation of inequalities in access. In the study by Chin and Philips (2004), the summer activities of children from upper and lower classes were compared. They found that "differences stem from parents' varying degrees of access to a wide range of resources, including money, the human capital to know how best to assess and improve children's skills, the cultural capital to know how best to cultivate children's talents, and the social capital to learn about and gain access to programs and activities" (185). Basically, children from wealthier classes have greater access to the forms of human and cultural capital that function to maintain power and privilege. These children have greater access because their parents have already acquired these forms of capital, most likely from their own parents. And, thus, access to important forms of cultural and human capital is maintained within the more privileged groups, which allows them to build greater social capital. Although less privileged individuals in this study by Chin and Philips (2004) also able to provide activities for their children to develop beneficial capital, their access to these forms was much more limited.

As illustrated in the aforementioned studies, access to beneficial forms of capital is somewhat unequal. Generally those starting from higher socioeconomic positions are able to acquire the forms of capital with greater resources. Working within the status attainment paradigm in sociology, Coleman (1988) states, "the person who invests time and resources in building up capital reaps its benefits in the form of a higher-paying job [and] more satisfying or higher-status work" (116). According to Bourdieu (1986), each type of capital ultimately is founded on the amount of economic capital, which affords time and resources for their development. Therefore, it is predicted that minors at a shelter will have limited access to the human, cultural, and social resources that are helpful for socio-economic mobility and achievement.

Method
I conducted semi-structured interviews with three homeless mothers who resided with at least one of their children at a shelter on Meeting

Street. Each interview took approximately 30 minutes. The interviews followed a flexible conversation-style format in order to allow for the exploration of unexpected themes. Any noteworthy topics not included in the original interview guide were added for subsequent interviews, if applicable to the study. The objective of the interviews was to determine the extent of access to human, cultural, and social capital among homeless children below 18-years-old. In order to assess their access, I asked homeless mothers to describe their children's family support, friendship network, education, obstacles, and opportunities.

Following the same procedure, but with a different interview guide, I interviewed five staff members at the shelter. These interviews focused on the same objective. However, I also asked participants for their insights on mother-child interactions, frequent concerns, and determining factors for children's futures. Furthermore, I asked both groups of participants (i.e. homeless mothers and staff members) for their suggestions on creating a beneficial child/teen program involving College of Charleston students. None of the participants interviewed was below the age of 18. I taped and then transcribed each interview after the participant provided proper consent.

Development of Human Capital: School and Teachers

The schools attended by children from the shelter varied widely in quality according to the mothers interviewed. Two of the mothers expressed complete disgust with the academic shortcomings of several schools that serve the students in the shelter. As one mother exclaimed, "my daughter comes home with misinformation and I haven't been in school for a thousand years, so I shouldn't have to go back and teach my daughters […] the basics." The poor schooling of children at the shelter reached the attention of another mother interviewed when other residents at the shelter asked her to help their children with homework. She was visibly flabbergasted in recounting how elementary school children "didn't have any basic math skills whatsoever." According to this mother, these children "were all very bright and just didn't have the tools." Upon this realization, she explained to the children: "the rest of the world had all these [times tables] memorized by the third grade, you were supposed to too, but something went wrong and so you need to sit

here and memorize it now." If children at the shelter attend schools that fail to teach fundamental academic skills, higher educational attainment is unlikely. Students must demonstrate these skills in standardized tests, not only for college entrance requirements, but also to acquire scholarships, which are vital for this group.

One mother interviewed attributed these academic deficits to teacher apathy, complaining that "teachers don't work with their students." Although this mother insisted she willingly helps her own daughter with homework, "the teachers got to back [her] up and they're not doing that." Ultimately, she concluded that the teachers are "just kind of passing [students] through without really teaching them." This insight is somewhat supported by one of the staff member's claims that the child population at the shelter generally received good grades. Perhaps this discrepancy exists between grades and actual academic skills because of low expectations among teachers. Furthermore, such low expectations may reduce the students' motivation, which is itself a form of human capital (Becker 1993).

One mother actually discussed a "vicious cycle" at school in which her daughter "doesn't apply herself, [the teachers] don't apply themselves and if they don't apply themselves, she won't apply herself." This cycle may reduce her daughter's educational attainment, ultimately limiting opportunities for socio-economic mobility. If teachers really do have low academic expectations, then homeless children attending these schools clearly will have a disadvantage when taking standardized test. In a longitudinal study of British students, "personal motivation and teacher expectations" are found to be the two most influential factors that account for variation in students' exam scores (Schoon et al. 2004: 394).

Whereas this mother disapproved of her eldest daughter's teachers, she praised one of her other daughter's teachers, describing her as "God sent." This model teacher was praised for "find[ing] out the best of each of her students and pull[ing] it out of them." Other mothers interviewed also appreciated the encouragement and extra help from certain teachers. Both of these mothers appeared pleased by their daughters' academic performance under such caring teachers. As one of these mother's emphasized, "if you love a child for what they do,

they're going to want to come to school […] they're going to like learning." Thus, these teachers' positive expectations fueled their students' motivation, which ultimately increases the possibility for academic achievement and attainment. The highly-regarded teachers also kept these two mothers informed on the progress of their children. This communication is important because parental involvement also partially determines a child's achievement in school.

Enriching Activities

Certain activities both in and outside of school may also play an important role in developing human capital. For instance, numerous studies have shown a correlation between exposure to the arts and higher educational attainment (Fiske; Deasy 2002). The arts are attributed with "promoting cognitive development" and increasing "student motivation" (Fiske 4). Not surprisingly, some studies have even suggested that involvement in the arts can help prevent students from dropping out of school (Deasy 2002). Unfortunately, however, children from lower socioeconomic classes generally have less exposure to the arts, partially due to under-funded school districts. Interestingly, mothers at the shelter tended to mention art activities with positive ratings of schools. Furthermore, all the mothers emphasized the enjoyment their children gained from partaking in the arts. Two mothers interviewed discussed their children's exposure to musical instruments in school. Several studies suggest that "perception and comprehension in mathematics" increase with greater knowledge of music (Fiske 4).

Although one mother interviewed demonstrated the ability to support her son's interest and talent in music, financial resources obviously help in providing tools and instruction. Two other mothers interviewed mentioned the stress associated with providing fully for their children due to their limited finances. Inexpensive activities are offered at public libraries, of which one mother said she took advantage. However, greater financial resources provide more opportunities for such enriching activities, as seen in a study by Chin and Phillips (2003) that found a "talent development gap" among children from different socioeconomic classes. Another limitation was mentioned by a mother who planned to put up a canvas in her daughter's room, but was unable

to do so until they moved out of the shelter because they have little personal space. Thus, children at the shelter are able to develop human capital through art, but their opportunities to do so are more limited than those with greater financial resources.

Staff members also voiced concerns over the lack of certain material resources in the shelter that could provide enrichment. Two mothers express the need for a computer to both help entertain and educate children. For children who "need access to a computer" for homework, they usually "can't just hop in car and go to the library and be there till the library closes like other people's children can be," one staff member emphasized. This obviously puts homeless students at a disadvantage in comparison to their classmates for educational attainment. Furthermore, developing computer skills are usually necessary for entering the current job market. Larrison et al. (2002) speculate that actually having a computer at home is more conducive to developing these skills than using a public computer. Therefore, the children at the shelter may experience another barrier to socio-economic achievement because they only have access to public computers.

Parental Support and Guidance

According to Human Capital Theory, the human capital of children largely develops through parents' investment of time and resources for passing on their own human capital (Chin and Phillips 2004). Schoon and Sacker (2004) add support to this theory with their findings that the combination of parental involvement and aspirations, along with five other closely related factors, influence 35% of exam score variation (394). Thus, the academic performance of children at the shelter partially hinges on the time and resources their parents can provide. Unfortunately, a staff member interviewed saw parents "not making their kids participate in any reading or doing their homework when they're supposed to and not going to bed like they should." This problem was also mentioned by another staff member, who loved seeing "mothers sitting with their children reading books or just playing with them on the mats before they go to sleep," but found it difficult enough to make some mothers prepare their own children for bed. This lack of attention may reduce children's development of human capital. In his discussion of human

capital, Becker (1993) explains that "children learn more easily when they are better prepared by their families" (21).

As expressed by one staff member, someone needs "to reinforce the world as an interesting place to learn" for school-aged children. Mothers and staff members repeatedly mentioned the importance of structured activities and consistent routines. These concerns pertain to Becker's (1993) theory that "knowledge can be mastered" best through repetition and experience (51). Although one mother explained the difficulty of maintaining a structure within the shelter, she insisted that "we still have a regimen." Another mother also stressed the need to stay "on the same track" as before coming to the shelter. Not only is this structure important for maintaining academic achievement, but also supporting the mental health for children experiencing the changes of shelter life, according to all the mothers and staff members interviewed. Homelessness is a risk factor for children in developing psychological problems (Brooks-Gunn and Duncan 1997), which ultimately may reduce children's ability to achieve within both educational and career settings (Becker 1993). Therefore, homeless children may be at greater risk for problems in developing human capital, unless adequate protective factors intervene.

Unfortunately, homeless mothers may be less able to provide support according to data collected through McChesney's (1995) empirical research review. Compared to the housed population, previous psychiatric hospitalization is two to four times, and drug abuse is two to eight times, higher among homeless women (McChesney 1995). These personal issues may interfere with their ability to provide adequate support. Four of the staff members directly discussed deficits in parental support resulting from psychological problems or drug dependency. According to one of these staff members, some children missed school because their parents would stay out on the streets all night consuming alcohol and drugs. Another staff member spoke of a mother with such "low self-esteem" that "she never took her child" to school. However, another staff member adamantly pointed out that some women at the shelter "had severe mental health problems […] like schizophrenia, but were very good with their children." Three staff members agreed that no single demographic factor determined parenting skills.

Some mothers cannot provide support because their own educational background is inadequate. As expressed by one staff member, "there comes a point, unfortunately it gets earlier and earlier, where the parents can no longer help their children with their homework because what the children are doing is beyond the parents' capabilities." Two other staff members conceded that some mothers were illiterate. Apparently, some "mothers were asking" one of the mothers interviewed to help their children with homework. This suggests that although these mothers were unable to provide support themselves, they still valued their children's education. Two mothers interviewed could provide support, thanks to their previously acquired knowledge, by recognizing academic problems. Thus, their human capital passed onto the children they tutored. Several staff members and one mother expressed a need for tutors to help these children reach their potentials in school. Obviously, if students are unable to understand and complete their homework then their chances for building human capital through educational attainment are greatly reduced.

Development of Cultural Capital: Classroom Behavior

Education is one of the first institutions children encounter in which their developed *habitus* is tested against the dominant cultural capital. Their educational attainment and subsequent socioeconomic mobility partially depends on whether they posses the cultural capital for following school regulations and expectations as determined by the white middle class (Payne 2005; Lareau 2003; Chambliss 1978). Staff members (notably providing a mainly middle-class perspective) expressed concern that some of the children where not acquiring appropriate behavioral skills for school. For instance, one staff member said some children were going to school without "learning how to submit to authority" or "that there are consequences for [their] actions." In her opinion, this lack of behavioral regulation and submission "makes it difficult" at school. All the staff members voiced concerns about some mothers' insufficient parenting skills, specifically in the area of discipline.

For developing appropriate behavior, structure and consistency were repeatedly cited as vital, even by all the mothers interviewed. For instance, one staff member recalled witnessing mothers who frequently gave into

their children's demands after being nagged. Another staff member explained, some mothers in the shelter allowed their children's misbehavior to "keep going and get worse and worse…and then they want to try to discipline [their child], but [they've] let it go too far." This failure to discipline is an even greater problem when children are having a difficult time adjusting to the shelter, emphasized one staff member. Another staff member suggested that some children become very bitter about their situation and, as a coping mechanism, "take it out by being disrespectful or talking back." In support of this observation, another staff member said that some children "tend to become a little rebellious." She further explained that this misbehavior generally occurs when "mom's not doing what she's supposed to."

Mothers, however, are able to mitigate the negative impact of instability on their children's development of cultural capital. Several staff members emphasized the mothers' reaction to shelter-life as a determining factor for their children's adjustment and subsequent behavior. One of the mothers illustrates this point well through her recollection of first entering the shelter and the changes in her children's behavior. According to her, these behavioral changes were her children's attempts to "see what they can get away with" in the new environment. However, this mother was apparently able to control their behavior by maintaining the same rules to which they were accustomed. All the mothers interviewed appeared to have minimal, if any, problems with regulating their children's behaviors. One staff member praised mothers who provided their children with "reasonable and effective consequences when they do wrong things," ultimately teaching them how to behave in a socially acceptable manner, naturally according to middle-class standards.

At the same time, this staff member acknowledged that a lack of "private space" in the shelter limits parents' abilities to properly discipline their children appropriately. One of the mothers somewhat verified this problem with her complaint that she must discipline her children under the scrutiny of "forty other women." She expressed some guilt at having to "embarrass" her children when they were misbehaving by disciplining them in front of an audience. According to a staff member, one of the main methods of appropriate discipline is impossible in the

shelter because there are simply "no good places for time out." This method of discipline is common in school and if young children at the shelter are not acquainted with it, they may experience more difficulties with their teachers. An even greater concern expressed by several staff members was the abuse that some mothers turned to as a method of discipline. Thankfully, none of the mothers interviewed showed any indication of abusive tendencies. However, children who do experience abuse are at greater risk for developing aggressive antisocial behaviors (Cummings and Davies 2002).

Disrespecting rules and challenging authority figures can obviously cause problems within school, and misbehaving may actually result in harsher consequences for homeless children. Chambliss (1978) studied deviant teenagers from different socioeconomic classes, finding that teachers and community members were much more aware of and concerned with the antisocial behaviors of the lower class. Upper class teenagers demonstrated cultural capital in covering up their antisocial behaviors, such as faking complete remorse when caught (Chambliss 1978). Defiant behavior in the face of authority emerged as one of the main reasons the lower class teenagers faced more severe consequences. Therefore, either poor adjustment or inappropriate discipline can reduce the chances of educational attainment and socioeconomic achievement of children at the shelter, if they develop the defiant behavior to which some interviewees alluded.

Deviance from Dominant Culture

Several of the mothers and staff members expressed concern over the extent to which the homeless shelter differs from a "normal" home environment. According to these interviewees, they are exposed to this "different world," rather than "the normal American childhood experience" of suburban children. For instance, one of these staff members discussed how these children are "exposed to dangers that normal children wouldn't necessarily be exposed to." According to Payne (2005), children experiencing poverty must focus on surviving the present rather than planning for the future. This theory contends that children from higher classes develop more abstract forms of thought partially because they are more focused on the future. Since

educational attainment reflects one's "ability to deal with abstract representational systems," children at the shelter may experience a disadvantage (Payne 2005).

Oftentimes before entering the shelter, children were already in some sort of unstable living condition. For these children, fulfilling the basic needs of shelter, safety, and sustenance may have dominated their attention. Even within the shelter itself, a lack of stability and a protective home environment were concerns repeatedly expressed for the children by both mothers and staff members. These interviewees noted the potential threats from people who hang around the shelter and even some other residents. Although many of the interviewees agreed that attentive mothers are able to provide some stability for their children at the shelter, they also emphasized that there is just no substitute for a home.

Children from the shelter may also experience a disadvantage in school because the material covered is determined by the dominant middle class culture. One staff member admitted that some of the children demonstrated difficulty at school with a music course because "they're used to listing to urban music" and "need to be more exposed to culture." With limited access to the library and other enriching after-school activities, homeless children do not get the same "exposure to music and art," another staff member expanded. Thus, suburban children arguably have an advantage in developing cultural capital required in educational institutions through their greater financial resources. However, the mothers interviewed still provided some "cultural" exposure to their children. One mother expressed how she raised her son "to try everything" and supported him in various musical and academic endeavors. Similarly, the two other mothers interviewed supported their daughters' interests in the arts. Yet, Schoon and Sacker that "more privileged homes have more educational opportunities" thanks to greater monetary resources (384).

Furthermore, Chin and Phillips (2004) found that a "talent development gap" formed during the summer between students of different socio-economic classes (206). They determined that "a combination of financial resources, parental time, parental knowledge, and a relatively safe environment" allowed for the more "active or varied"

developmental experiences of the higher class (Chin and Phillips 2004: 193-4). The lack of access to varied activities may impair the educational attainment of disadvantaged children, as demonstrated by Wertheimer (1996). In this study, the standardized tests scores of children from low socio-economic classes improved after their exposure to more middle-class activities (Wertheimer 1996). Bourdieu (1986) emphasized that the value of activities as cultural capital is determined "according to its distance from the demands of the scholastic market" (49). Since the educational system is currently a middle-class institution, the scholastic market tends to align more with their activities. This cultural capital bias may reduce the educational attainment of children at the shelter.

Development of Social Capital: the Nuclear Family

For children, the family is generally their first base for developing social capital. According to Coleman (1988), "the relations between children and parents" determine the strength of social capital within families (10). Social capital requires close relationships with quality interactions, personal attention, and emotional support (Astone et al. 1999). As Furstenberg and Hughes (1995) found, "emotional bonding within the family" promote the development of children's mental health (589). Therefore, social capital can help children deal with their emotions surrounding homelessness and shelter life. All the parents interviewed seemed to maintain close relationships with their children, providing them with that emotional support. For instance, one mother interviewed made a point of talking with her son about their situation and his concerns. Furthermore, she remained attentive to any changes in her son's behavior indicative of a problem. The other two mothers emphasized their children's need for love and attention, particularly within the shelter. Even though one of these mothers had several children, she ensured that her children "feel like they're getting that individual love" by setting aside "at least one hour a week" alone with each one.

Unfortunately these mothers seem to be the exception rather than the rule in creating social capital with their children. One of the mothers interviewed expressed concern about others who "need to stop and realize that family is more important." Too many mothers "tend to

spend more time getting themselves involved in [*the jungle*]" and "are more interested in their boyfriends than they are in their children," two staff members agreed. Another staff member lamented on how one mother "never really took too much time or interest in doing things together as a family." According to yet another staff member, the overwhelming stress associated with living in a shelter may create "resentment" for children among some mothers, which can result in neglect. Two of the mothers interviewed felt that having children at the shelter resulted in greater stress, but gave absolutely no indication of resenting or neglecting their children. At any rate, children with emotionally neglectful parents cannot develop that basic form of social capital within the family. According to Morrell-Bellai et al. (2000), "an unsupportive family of origin" may correspond to developing "poor interpersonal skills," which ultimately limit children's acquirement of social capital when they attempt to form supportive networks later in life (593).

Social capital "depends both on the physical presence of adults in the family and on the attention given by adults to the children" (Coleman 1988: 111). Most of the children at the shelter are without fathers; therefore, that physical presence is lacking. In the study by Furstenberg and Hughes (1995), higher socio-economic success of children appeared to correlate with the presence and support of biological fathers. Unfortunately, according to one staff member, quite a few of the women at the shelter escaped from abusive relationships. In fact, the general population of homeless mothers is twice as likely to have experienced physically abusive relationships (McChesney 1995). One mother interviewed confided that she narrowly escaped several abusive relationships before coming to the shelter. Obviously, remaining in such detrimental relationships puts both the mother and children in great danger. At the same time, too many children "are growing up without [...] positive male role models in their lives," one staff member sighed. One of the mothers interviewed was currently with a supportive male while the two other mothers recognized the need for positive masculine influences.

The Greater Family and Community

According to Astone (1996), "family formation is among the most important types of investment in social capital made in all societies" (6). Furstenberg and Hughes (1995) add support to this statement with the findings that higher socio-economic success rates correlate with stronger relationships between children and their grandmothers. They conclude that "those families with tighter links to the extended family generate more social capital for youth to draw on" (Furtenberg and Hughes 1995: 584). Children in a shelter clearly lack strong social capital with extended family members; otherwise they might not be homeless. Generally, these children depend on their mothers for the development of social capital within their extended family. If supportive relationships with families cannot be maintained, then children are less likely to benefit from any resources these relatives could provide. According to one staff member, most women in the shelter "don't want to go to their family for whatever reason or their famil[ies] don't want to come to them. That's how they end up here." She goes on to explain that some mothers "have burned a lot of bridges" with "gambling or alcoholism or drugs."

However, this staff member also admits that some mothers come from abusive families, which are more detrimental than supportive. For instance, one mother interviewed revealed that she suffered from abuse growing up. Another mother explained how she "grew up pretty much in a broken home" until "they took [her] away" from her mother and placed her in foster care. According to a study of homeless adults in Canada, 64.3% suffered from some form of abuse while growing up (Morrell-Bellai et al. 587). More specifically, about 41% of homeless mothers experienced childhood abuse in comparison to 5% of housed mothers (McChesney 439). Not all the mothers interviewed mentioned problems with abuse, but they all were fairly isolated from other relatives. Distance, death, and abuse were the various reasons listed for the lack of social capital with other family members. As one staff member explained, "whereas other famil[ies] may have relatives that they can lean back on if they have to […] these children have nobody to fall back on" in financial crises, explained one staff member.

Apparently, homeless mothers suffer from severe social capital deficits. Bassuck and Rosenberg found that 22% of the homeless, versus 2% of the housed, felt "unable to name any person who provided social support" (McChesney 442). One of the mothers interviewed frankly stated that she has "a hard time with trust issues" and, therefore, showed little interest in forming a network of friends. Although this view is understandable considering her background, "the presence of a strong help network and whether the mother sees a close friend weekly, are both strongly related to favorable outcomes" in children's socio-economic mobility (Furstenberg and Hughes 587). The other two mothers interviewed illustrated several instances in which their friends were beneficial resources for their children. For instance, one of the mother's friends "did music in the classroom," exposing her daughter to instruments and culture. Another mother interviewed was even able to create a "committee" consisting of "friends' husbands" for her son's development, despite his father's absence. Yet, as one staff member explained, often shelter residents "don't have many friends…and they have pretty much used that system up because they're so drained when they come here."

The transient living locations of homeless families may further limit children's development of social capital. Coleman (1988) theorized that "mobile families" are unable to form close relationships with neighbors and, therefore, lack the resources communities can provide (113). The social capital of a community, as Martin et al. (2004) found, may even "decrease odds of experiencing hunger" for families struggling financially (264). This aid may even prevent homelessness since low-incomes force families to choose between paying rent and buying adequate food. As pointed out by a staff member, the parents who come to the shelter "tend to be transient in terms of not staying in a neighborhood for ten years." The backgrounds of all the mothers interviewed seemed to reflect this trend to some degree. One mother even stated, "there is nobody here, just us" since they recently moved from up north. Several staff members expressed dismay over instances where mothers repeatedly entered shelters, sometimes in different locations. Unfortunately, one staff member explained that "some of the children are used to homelessness."

"It takes a village to raise a child and I think these kids are missing a village." After making this poignant comment, one staff member contrasted the suburban experience of visiting "Mrs. Smith down the street who bakes cookies" to that of trying to find "somebody who's not dealing crack out on the street" by the shelter, just to play football. This comparison illustrates Loury's (1977) finding that children in urban areas experience greater difficulty in developing social capital (Astone 1999). Both the impersonal atmosphere and criminal activity in urban areas can undermine its development. As stated by a staff member, the children at the shelter are "exposed to things that no other children are exposed to…like alcohol, drug-users, and sex offenders" in and around the area. Another staff member cited the "crack houses next door" and "hypodermics" left in playgrounds, as evidence of the detrimental environment in which children cannot be expected to form social capital. One mother summed up these concerns by exclaiming, "the neighborhood, well, it's terrible."

Greater Society

Developing social capital among peers may also prove more difficult for children living at a homeless shelter. Sadly, some of the staff members reported incidences in which "the children are picked on" and even ostracized for being "homeless." One of the staff members referred to a specific case of a girl who became absolutely miserable because other "kids were really rough on her." According to several staff members, children in middle school and high school endure the most taunting, possibly because "peers are more likely to know where they are." A staff member explained that adolescence is a stressful period for seeking social approval and for homeless youths, "it's just another strike against you," as one staff member explained. According to another staff member, some youths react by becoming "loners" who "won't jump in and play with other children their age." At the other extreme, one staff member stated that some children "get into fights" as a "defense mechanism." Obviously, such behavior causes considerable problems at school in developing social capital among both peers and professors. Properly developing social capital increases children's probability of

graduating from high school, particularly when friendships are formed with academic achievers (Coleman 1988; Crosnoe et al. 2003).

The children of the mothers interviewed, however, seemed to develop social capital at school. One mother discussed how her son is forming "his own support network" at school, including friends who are aware of his situation. The two other mothers beamed with pride over their daughters' magnetic personalities which, according to them, made developing networks of friends fairly easy. The fact that these parents know about their children's social network, in itself, is a form of social capital. According to the study by Furstenberg and Hughes (1995), "parents' knowledge of their children's friends is strongly associated with the socio-economic outcomes" (587). If the parents of these homeless children's friends are also informed about their children's social network, they may prove valuable resources. For instance, one mother explained how the fathers of her son's friends want to provide extra help once they discover she is a single mother. These fathers possibly open up opportunities to participate in activities her son might not otherwise enjoy due to the location of the shelter and limited transportation.

One staff member was particularly concerned about the limited opportunities children have at the shelter for interacting with their peers. Simple activities to develop social capital, such as conversing on the phone and partaking in sleepovers, are not as possible within a shelter environment, according to her. "When you live in a shelter and the only phone you have access to is a payphone," she explains, "you can't really talk on the phone with your bud." Another staff member raised the problem teenagers must have with trying to form romantic relationships, like having to "tell your date: 'you know, I live in a homeless shelter.'" These interviewees concluded that "it's incredibly difficult for a lot of them to have those opportunities their peers have," due not only to the limitations of the shelter, but also the desire to hide the fact that one lives there. This desire brings forth the greater issue that the homeless population in general must face: social isolation. Most of the mothers and staff members expressed a need for more social support from the greater community. According to Chin and Phillips (2004), social capital that "crosses social-class lines […] serv[es] as a substitute

for financial resources that economically disadvantaged children lack"
(187). The different facets of social capital, such as "instrumental,
emotional and informational assistance" (Crowell 15) could increase
"if the community […] would just embrace" those living at the shelter,
as one staff member implored. Another staff member laments that the
children at the shelter lack "that human interaction […] that lets them
know that somebody cares about them as a human being […] because
unfortunately society treats this whole population as if they're
disposable."

Development of Capital: A Recommendation

Children at the shelter appear to face greater barriers in developing
the human, cultural, and social capital for socioeconomic mobility than
others who begin in higher socio-economic classes. However, the
resources and subsequent opportunities for socio-economic mobility
varied markedly among the children within the shelter itself. All the
staff members somewhat attributed this variance to the mothers. As
one staff member stated, with the presence of a good parent, children
have "a better chance whether they're living in a housing project, or
even if they're living in a mansion." Whether or not they have effective
parental support, children at the homeless shelter could benefit from
additional support from mentors who possess the forms of capital that
they lack. Perhaps, students and professors can draw on their own
resources to help both children and mothers with socio-economic
achievement. In this process, we may even benefit from a better
understanding of the relationship between the two worlds of Meeting
Street.

In the interviews, I actually asked the mothers and the staff members
for their opinion on how the College of Charleston community could
benefit children at the shelter. I had hoped to design a program that
would help children at the shelter develop the necessary capital for
socio-economic mobility and achievement. The interviewees responded
with numerous recommendations, all pertaining to some sort of activity
with the children. Through my research, however, I concluded that
developing a program strictly for the children at the shelter was
impractical. As one of the staff members pointed out, "children are a

very low percentage of what we get here at the family shelter." At the time I decided to focus on children's position at the shelter, the percentage was actually quite high and several staff members and residents mentioned the need for child-oriented programs. But shortly after this decision, almost all the mothers moved out of the shelter and I was actually unable to complete as many interviews with mothers as originally intended. In my last few days at the shelter, however, several of the new residents were mothers with children.

One staff member advised that this fluctuation makes it "very difficult to plan children's programs because we never know from one day to the next whether or not we're going to have children here." She further cautioned that if volunteers for a program repeatedly turn up but find no children to help, their motivation will probably wane quickly. Even when children are present, the activities required according to the age group and development level vary considerably. Therefore, a flexible program is required to appropriately address the needs of such a fluctuating population. One of the mothers recommended regularly assessing "the face and nature of the shelter" and simply asking staff members and residents "*what do you need now?*" Furthermore, she suggested creating a mentoring program, for which several other interviewees also expressed an interest. Mentors could potentially provide new sources of human, cultural, and social capital to both mothers and children at the shelter (Astone et al. 1999; Lin 1999, 2000; Crowell 2004; Williams et al.; Martin et al. 2004).

However, perhaps an even more flexible program would better suit the fluctuating shelter population and volunteer limitations. I see an opportunity for enhancing an already well established program to help develop capital. Practically every night a group cooks for the residents at the shelter. Actually, once a week the Honors Department at the College of Charleston fills this occupation. Generally after serving the residents, most members of these groups remain in the kitchen. I recommend that any volunteers unoccupied in the kitchen sit down and have dinner with the children, mothers, and residents alike. Something as simple as volunteers conversing over dinner could provide valuable resources.

Repeatedly, both staff members and mothers emphasized the importance of the attention and encouragement others can provide just by interacting. As one staff member explained, this human interaction helps provide meaning and a reason to continue "striving" forward for everyone.   Along a similar vein, another staff member stated, "if they have someone to encourage them and show them that they can bounce back and do well…they will try to do well. They need positive reinforcement." According to this staff member, many of these women suffer from depression and low self-esteem. Social support can mitigate depression for these, oftentimes, marginalized individuals (Ennet et al. 1999). According to a study by Williams et al. (2001), motivation and meaning are two "resilient" characteristics that are predictive of returning to one's feet to, perhaps, take that walk up Meeting Street (250).

Moreover, from these interactions, volunteers can help assess what the current needs of individual residents their available resources for fulfilling them. For instance, several mothers and staff members mentioned the stress of living in a shelter, particularly for parents. To help alleviate some of this stress, they recommended that volunteers provide babysitting. One of the mothers even suggested forming a support group for mothers that could meet when their children are being watched. Volunteers could possibly help form similar programs according to the needs of the individuals currently in the shelter. Each volunteer has different human, cultural and social capital to contribute towards various programs. For instance, a psychology major could teach appropriate methods for dealing with stress or may even have connections to professionals in the field, willing to offer their services. Similarly, education students could contribute their skills by tutoring children while their parents are in support sessions.

Ultimately programs like this could help develop the human, cultural, and social capital of children and adults alike.   As Lin (2000) states, "embeddedness in resource-rich social networks increases the likelihood of receiving useful information" (792). The information that could transfer from volunteers to residents includes anything from computer skills (i.e. human capital) to training for job interviews (i.e. cultural capital). According to Lin (1999) "accessing resources beyond the usual

social circles" is necessary for socioeconomic achievement among marginalized individuals (483). One of the major themes that emerged in the interviews is the isolation of residents from the greater community. Several staff members and mothers emphasized the importance of having "outside influences." Students and faculty members from the college community, therefore, could be a part of this resource network, increasing shelter residents' social capital.

On an even broader scope, individuals from the college community could analyze the causes and effects of homelessness through their different field hermeneutics, since multiple perspectives increase understanding and the development of more appropriate solutions. Furthermore, college students could learn a great deal in their respective fields through tackling these real-world issues. When I asked one mother what she thought of instituting a program between College of Charleston and the shelter, she quoted the prime Minister of India's opinion of the Peace Corps: "I think it will benefit the American college students to come and learn from the poverty we have here." I fully agree. What I learned from the individuals at the shelter can never be adequately expressed in mere words. But, as pertains to this report, I found that the American ideal only exists in an "imaginary universe of perfect competition or perfect equality of opportunity" (Bourdieu 1986: 47). Through greater awareness and compassion of those with capital, perhaps our reality can come closer to this ideal.

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